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Women in Conflict Zones: Exploring their Roles in Terrorism and Peacebuilding Initiatives in Northwestern Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Women's potential contributions to peacebuilding efforts have gained recognition at the national, regional, and global levels in recent years. Given the ongoing disproportionate impact of violence on women in the most severely impacted conflict areas, international development efforts have prioritized the identification of crucial concerns related to peace, security, and women. The women living in the newly merged districts (NMDs) of Pakistan have continually taken a prominent role in the effort to establish peace and security in the region. The increasing infringement of women's rights in the tribal belt has allowed terrorists to exploit the deep-seated hostility, thereby becoming a significant threat to the regional government's authority. The NMDs offer numerous opportunities to comprehend the suffering that women who were subject to instability throughout the conflict experienced. Pakistan's security strategy and efforts to combat violent extremism do not adequately take into account female considerations. To ensure the protection and enhance the involvement of individuals in public matters, additional legal, political, and economic reforms are required. The inquiry on the involvement of women in peacebuilding in Pakistan highlights the need for the government to prioritize policy measures that incorporate gender perspectives while also improving the effectiveness of existing initiatives. This paper will also address women's involvement in peacebuilding and combating violent extremism in the light of Hadith and Quranic verses.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, Militancy, Terrorism, Gender Responsive Approach, Newly Merged Districts (NMDs)*



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Introduction

The nations affected by the "war on terror" underwent significant changes. The presence of ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts led to a gradual deterioration of social unity. Gender-based violence resulting from conflicts has a disproportionate effect on women, impacting them both directly and indirectly. They may provide operational services and assistance to individuals who commit crimes, their accomplices, or the individuals affected by the crimes. Women who have experienced the loss of male family members may resort to violent extremism as a means of seeking revenge. The Chechen "Black Widows" are an example of such a group, known for carrying out suicide assaults during the Chechen-Russian conflict in the 1990s. According to one assessment, secular organizations were said to be responsible for 85 percent of female suicide attacks until 2009.¹

Extremist religious organizations promote a narrative that opposes the progress of women's education and empowerment. At first, Al Qaeda maintained that women should not be engaged in direct combat but should instead be used in auxiliary roles. In 2010, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula actively sought the involvement of Muslim women in the Yemen conflict. The emergence of the militant Islamic State organization facilitated the participation of women in combat alongside men. Financially impoverished women may be attracted to extremist organizations because of the heightened social status they receive as wives or mothers inside these organizations.² The rise in the number of fighters marrying Islamist partners following September 11th led to an influx of international women into battle zones. Extremist organizations can utilize technology as a means to radicalize women, specifically. Al Qaeda released the online women's magazines Al Khansaa and TTP Sunnat-i-Khola in 2004 and 2017, respectively. Pakistan's security strategy and efforts to combat violent extremism do not adequately take into account female considerations. Legislation in Punjab and Balochistan provides compensation to civilian victims of terrorism. However, bureaucratic hurdles sometimes hinder women who have lost male breadwinners from accessing these benefits. To avoid widows becoming involved in legal conflicts, all provinces should have consistent compensation laws, improve transparency, and simplify procedures. Although there has been a growing focus on studying women's participation in violent extremism and Islamist terrorism since the establishment of the Islamic State in 2014, most of these research projects still primarily use examples from Western contexts. As a result, there is a lack of extensive study and policy discussion on the involvement of women in terrorism in Southeast and South Asia. The predominance of male-centered viewpoints and the comparatively limited presence of women in Islamist

extremist groups in Pakistan have contributed to the conventional notion that women's participation is uncommon rather than normal. Gendered perceptions of masculinity and femininity have a significant influence on the recruitment, roles, and motivations of women involved in terrorism. The Quran states,

”يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ
وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَن تَعْدِلُوا وَإِن تَلَوُوا
أَوْ نَعَرَضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا.”³

O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted.

These principles highlight the need for policies that are transparent, just, and compassionate, ensuring that women are not hindered by bureaucratic obstacles and are treated with fairness and respect.

Various Islamist terrorist organizations in Pakistan actively recruit women for different roles. These initiatives systematically exclude women, despite the extensive body of research that has consistently shown their crucial contribution in preventing and combating violent extremism (P/CVE). State and congressional lawmakers continue to maintain gendered assumptions that downplay women's ability to participate in lethal acts of terrorism. This impedes the efficacy of preventative and critical video event (P/CVE) activities and hampers the implementation of comprehensive legislation that embraces both violent and nonviolent individuals. Cultural and societal constraints impede women's participation in community rehabilitation and reintegration. Given the significant threat posed by extremism, it is crucial for women to actively participate in combating violent extremism.⁴

Similarly, women's participation in the criminal justice system remains significantly inadequate, notwithstanding a small statistical progress, to empower them to have a significant impact on social unity. The recently merged regions provide numerous possibilities to understand the suffering experienced by women who were exposed to instability throughout the conflict. Despite their inaccessibility, many cultural obstacles hinder entry. The implementation of the National Internal Security Policy (2018–2023), which acknowledges the significance of women in leadership roles, would necessitate a considerable amount of time. Equally worrisome is the scarcity of female experts in VE and

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social cohesion. Implementing laws that favor women may be relatively straightforward in a patriarchal society, but creating organizations and environments that actively promote and empower women can be considerably more difficult. According to Section 73 of the KP Police Act, the IGP has the authority to create conflict resolution panels to resolve minor issues outside of the court system. Nevertheless, the legislation does not explicitly state whether women are eligible to participate in these councils. Although the issue of women's inclusion is not discussed, Section 47 specifically covers the process of establishing public consultative bodies.⁵

The integrity of the legal system is undermined when laws are passed without considering their broader context, when there is a lack of adequate resources for their implementation, and when law enforcement fails to effectively enforce them. These matters necessitate prompt consideration.

Although there have been significant improvements in women's political participation, protection of their rights, and overall safety, women living in the northwest tribal zone of Pakistan continue to face significant challenges in terms of security and economic opportunities. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was established by merging the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) following the approval of Pakistan's 25th constitutional amendment in 2018. The amendment, in conjunction with supplementary changes, has the potential to significantly enhance the empowerment of women, particularly those who have worked for peace in regions severely affected by violence. These improvements can offer these activists and advocates a higher probability of participating in peacebuilding endeavors in their conflict-affected regions. The lack of effective execution of reforms and an unpredictable security situation may hinder women in the NMDs from taking advantage of this substantial opportunity.

حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي مَالِكٌ، عَنْ صَفْوَانَ بْنِ سُلَيْمٍ، يَرْفَعُهُ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " السَّاعِي عَلَى الْأَرْمَلَةِ وَالْمُسْكِينِ كَالْمُجَاهِدِ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، أَوْ كَالَّذِي يَصُومُ النَّهَارَ وَيَقُومُ اللَّيْلَ ". حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي مَالِكٌ، عَنْ ثَوْرِ بْنِ زَيْدِ الدِّيَلِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي الْعَيْثِ، مَوْلَى ابْنِ مُطِيعٍ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِثْلَهُ.⁶

Narrated Safwan bin Salim: The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "The one who looks after and works for a widow and a poor person, is like a warrior fighting for Allah's Cause or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all night." Narrated Abu Huraira that the Prophet (ﷺ) said as above.

This hadith underscores the significant reward and virtue attached to supporting and caring for widows and impoverished individuals, equating such actions with the noble endeavors of a warrior fighting for the cause of Allah or a devout worshiper fasting by day and praying by night.

This paper focuses on the correlation between women and terrorism, specifically analyzing the involvement of women in peacebuilding initiatives in NMDs. It explores the obstacles they have encountered and the accomplishments they have attained.⁷ This document promotes the improvement of program effectiveness and the implementation of policies that are inclusive of all genders. It offers recommendations for improving the conditions of these women by increasing their access to opportunities, ensuring their security, promoting justice, and facilitating their political engagement. Additionally, this paper will also explore women's involvement in peacebuilding and combating violent extremism through the lens of Hadith and Quranic verses.

Research Methodology

This study relies on the use of documented information, specifically secondary data. The information provided in this document was gathered from a wide range of reliable sources and thorough investigations. As a result, additional resources like textbooks, scholarly articles, and written materials obtained from libraries were used. The research also made use of online sources that offered data on the gender perspective of counterterrorism. The author was deeply involved in the process of refining, interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing the subject matter. The study employs a qualitative methodology to conduct empirical research.

Women-Terrorism Nexus in Pakistan.

Since 2015, Pakistan has witnessed a significant increase in the recruitment of women into transnational jihadist groups, such as Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and the Islamic State (IS). Several examples of women actively participating in terrorist activities and radicalization include the Al Zikra Academy network, which consists of affluent women in Karachi who facilitate connections with the Islamic State and raise funds; the Shaheen Women's Wing of AQIS, which reportedly trains over 500 female suicide bombers; and the incident involving three women who fled to Syria in 2015 along with their twelve children.⁸

The presence of women in terrorist organizations is frequent in Pakistan. Pakistani governments and security agencies have taken an androcentric stance towards terrorist organizations, downplaying or ignoring the significant contributions made by women in these groups, including the Pakistan Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and more recently, AQIS and IS. These groups impose limitations

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on the positions that women can undertake, prohibit them from pursuing advanced education, and predominantly confine them to domestic responsibilities.⁹ Nevertheless, these organizations continue to support the assignment of women to specialized and vital positions that could be referred to as "women's jihad," even if they acknowledge the inherent gender inequalities in their vision of an "Islamic" society.

The strategic benefits of recruiting women.

Even though males make up the majority of their fighters, Islamist terrorist organizations intentionally target women. The lesser representation of women in these groups is sometimes misinterpreted as a measure of their lack of importance. However, the involvement of women is based on a "strategic logic" that in various ways promotes the goals of terrorist organizations. The motivations that prompt women to join terrorist organizations differ significantly from the recruitment strategies employed by these organizations. This perspective argues that the recruitment of women into terrorist organizations is justified by the strategic and tactical benefits they bring. According to Louise Richardson, these organizations might achieve recognition or "renown" by recruiting women as assailants. Some researchers discuss how female suicide bombers can increase the impact and attract media attention, therefore advancing a terrorist organization's goals.¹⁰ Due to the lack of physical security checks, the possibility of suicide bombings carried out by women wearing burqas is viable in Pakistan. Furthermore, organizations manipulate the involvement of women to coerce males, especially those with combat experience and enlisted as suicide bombers, into participating in violent jihad. According to a study, women play a crucial role in "state-building jihadi organizations" that exploit violence to develop a functioning "state" for the group. This refers to actions focused on the family, where women strengthen the idea that "people hold power" through reproduction and the passing down of the group's influence between generations. It also encompasses women working in fields such as education, law enforcement, and medicine to support and aid other women.

Islamist organizations, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) in Pakistan, utilize guerilla tactics. While these groups lack territorial authority and are unlikely to appoint women to positions related to state establishment, they acknowledge the value of women in both violent and non-violent scenarios. Furthermore, they are organized into smaller units and networks. In addition, because of fierce rivalry from organizations such as IS, which actively recruit women and recognize their strategic importance in achieving goals, they demonstrate increased adaptability and appreciate the strategic value of women. In September 2017, the TTP was dissolved due to state-

run media operations and criticism from other organizations (IS and LeJ-A).¹¹ However, it later reestablished Sunnat-e-Khula, with a particular focus on women. The journal recommended that women participate in jihad by educating their children, spreading the group's ideology, and receiving physical training in handling weapons and ammunition.

Women's Personal and Political Motivations

Notable individuals in the media and positions of power continue to associate masculine or feminine characteristics with violent extremism. According to this line of thinking, women strive to accomplish personal goals, whereas men are assumed to be associated with terrorist groups for political reasons. It is frequently asserted that women's involvement is motivated by personal goals, such as ensuring marriage, protecting children, or pursuing revenge for offenses against their families. In contrast, men's goals are often linked to the protection of Islam and the resistance against oppressive Muslim rule. Put simply, research often overlooks the importance of physical and emotional factors when studying males, whereas it exaggerates and views them as major factors in the radicalization of women.

The participation of women in acts of terrorism in Pakistan can be linked to several circumstances, as demonstrated by case studies. A variety of factors, including political, religious, and cultural norms, can influence the likelihood of girls and boys joining terrorist organizations. As a result, women are refraining from joining terrorist organizations solely to seek revenge against their family members, form sexual connections with male recruiters, or succumb to the influence of their dads and spouses. Personal reasons can sometimes play a role in the process of radicalization. Noreen Leghari, a Pakistani suicide bomber, was recruited by a select group of male IS terrorists and later married one of them. Leghari and her spouse had made arrangements to carry out a suicide bombing when they were captured during a military raid.¹² In alternative settings, the process of radicalization that many women undergo does not include the participation of romantic relationships or masculine influences. Bushra Cheema and her four children fled Pakistan in 2015 to join the Islamic State in Syria. The data indicates that Cheema's choice to join IS may have been driven by political and religious influences rather than her husband's radicalization.¹³

Politicians and the traditional media's portrayal of women as mere tools of male-dominated leadership limits and oppresses their distinct attributes. Devorah Margolin's analysis delves into the assumption that women are subjected to maltreatment exclusively by males, as well as the lack of recognition of their political activity by terrorist organizations. This concerns the inflexible gender norms that ascribe passivity and strength, linking males with aggression and

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females with pacifism. Moreover, it offers a clarification for the term "jihadi brides," which is used to describe individuals who joined IS and relocated to Iraq and Syria. According to Brigitte L. Nacos, the married status of female legislators is a more prominent characteristic than that of male politicians. She argues that media depictions of male and female insurgents follow a similar line of reasoning.¹⁴ In this case, IS also supports the marriage of male terrorists, although it gives more importance to women in this regard and mentions it less frequently about males.

Role of women in peacebuilding.

Women have primarily utilized peaceful resistance techniques to combat jihadist harassment and oppression, starting from the inception of Islamist militancy in NMDs. Many women defied strict laws that prohibited them from leaving their homes to collect water and other essential items without the presence of a male guardian. Girls and their teachers in the Khyber agency of FATA and Swat developed strategies to circumvent the prohibition on female education, such as conducting classes within the teachers' residences.¹⁵ Despite facing threats from violent groups, women professionals persevered in their collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide healthcare and other essential services.

According to tribal Pashtun traditions, widows are obligated to marry someone from the family of their late husbands. In the tribal region, where the Pakistani Taliban held major power, many houses harbored at least one family member involved in terrorist activities. A significant number of individuals rejected the efforts made by Taliban leaders to coerce widows, whose husbands were killed in militant attacks, into marrying a family member who participated in the conflict. Furthermore, despite significant economic and cultural barriers that hindered the advancement of the women's movement, women occasionally took charge of negotiations with the Taliban. Female household members, especially wives, often advocated for the liberation of male relatives who had been taken by militants. Aware of the widespread growth of militancy, women continually took aggressive steps to dissuade the Taliban from enlisting their family members.

Religious factors were employed in another attempt to hinder the recruitment of militants. Zainab Azmat, the representative of FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) in the National Commission on the Status of Women and an activist from South Waziristan, highlighted the situation of a woman whose son was being trained in the use of suicide explosives. "Daily, she would position herself outside the mosque, which functioned as the trainers' headquarters, and recite Islamic teachings to emphasize that her son could not be trained for combat without her explicit approval." Although dislocation presented significant

challenges for women and girls, a certain group of them were eager to use these opportunities. Primarily, women living in the isolated rural areas of PATA and FATA had minimal opportunities for social advancement, relying on visits to family in nearby communities.¹⁶ Only a few individuals have dared to explore the urban centers of PATA or KPK. The problem of internally displaced persons (IDPs) interrupted these unchanging trends.

Due to the limitations imposed on their ability to move freely, women-initiated protests. Within IDP camps, male individuals would instruct their husbands, daughters, and other female relatives, stating, "It is forbidden for you to engage in any social interactions, and you must strictly adhere to the practice of purdah [veiling]." "Female internally displaced persons (IDPs) started to question the motives of their male counterparts, who were determined to restrict their movement," commented an activist from Dir.¹⁷ Women's understanding of the causes of domestic conflict was greatly improved by their interactions with the international world. Several women in this group are increasingly in agreement that family conflicts are a result of governmental carelessness as well as neglect from its agencies and associated tribe leaders.

Women in the region expressed public discontent with the regime, citing the pervasive violence that significantly impacted their daily existence. Women became acutely aware of the need for better service provision and their right to access such services when they noticed that the limited availability of healthcare and other essential services in IDP camps was lacking in their communities. As the vast majority of female internally displaced persons lived with host families, they were initially exposed to external sources of information, including the Internet and local and national media. Women professionals, such as NGO personnel and civil society advocates, participated in meetings with them in both camps and metropolitan locations like Peshawar, Mardan, and Mingora. According to a spokeswoman from PATA, upon their return to FATA and PATA, they presented new requests for access to markets, healthcare, education, and transportation. In addition, women sought access to financial resources and opportunities for skill enhancement.

The experiences of women in IDP communities can contribute to their achievement of economic and political independence, despite the challenges they face. To acquire a computerized national identity card, individuals were required to undergo biometric verification, which was occasionally available within IDP shelters¹⁸. Many women needed the card to open a bank account, withdraw money, and access other types of support. Holding this card also grants the privilege to participate in elections and be registered on the voter rolls. The female population of FATA began a movement for reform by utilizing their newly

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acquired skills and heightened engagement in society, particularly with civil society organizations. New forums and networks specifically for Indigenous women were established, including Taqra Qabaili Khwende and Qabaili Khor. Taqra Qabaili Khwende appointed a male mediator with sufficient privileges and trust in women for every tribal agency and frontier area. This person organized press conferences and meetings with government officials to raise awareness about the challenges and issues faced by women, especially about education and meaningful employment. Women's lobbies exerted influence on political party leaders to allocate seats in the federal parliament exclusively for female legislators from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).¹⁹ Female campaigners, who were equally driven, submitted petitions to the courts. Nevertheless, the primary goals of women activists were to eradicate *rewaj* (traditional customs) and eradicate colonial dominance.

According to the assessment of a peacebuilding expert, a significant proportion of women in Pakistan conceptualize peace as "a complex web of social connections, safeguarding of rights, inclusivity, and security in decision-making, rather than simply the absence of armed conflict." Tribal women frequently recognize that achieving social, political, and economic empowerment, ensuring personal protection, and having legal access are essential requirements for establishing peace.²⁰ Many of these women have made substantial contributions to preventing militant incursions into their villages and have called for broad political reform. However, these crucial elements are noticeably missing, which deprives these women of their proper privileges and obstructs their enormous contributions to the formation of nations and the advancement of peace. Engaging in cooperation with local, provincial, and donor organizations can facilitate the resolution of this issue.

Gendered Perspective on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

This study illustrates how a gendered perspective on violent extremism impedes our understanding of the tangible contributions of women to these organizations by commonly linking males to aggressive positions and women to nonviolent roles. Misinterpretations of the participation of women in terrorism, recruiting, and motivations within Islamist extremist organizations in Pakistan hinder the effectiveness of policy development and action planning at the governmental level. The lack of recognition of the possibility of violence among women initially hampers the effectiveness of security measures aimed at preventing and neutralizing this threat. Regulations on gender segregation at security checkpoints ban men from physically inspecting women, highlighting the crucial importance of employing women in security-related roles. The cultural

organizations' opposition to women's participation in the military has hindered their inclusion and training in the response units of Pakistan's Counter Terrorism Department.

Moreover, efforts to address violent extremism may be ineffective if authorities fail to fully understand the home roles of women, such as mothers and spouses. Imposing strong limitations on women's participation in this specific situation increases the likelihood of maintaining gender stereotypes that portray them as nonviolent, while simultaneously disregarding other important responsibilities that empower women to actively participate in their communities. Amn-o-Nisa, a significant civil society program in Pakistan, aims to educate and empower women in their communities to contribute to countering violent extremism (CVE) and peacebuilding.²¹ This technique asserts that mothers possess a distinct advantage in identifying initial indications of radicalization in their offspring and influencing them to renounce violent extremism. While there are situations where harnessing women's strengths might be beneficial, not all traditional cultures with strong family systems can reap the benefits of these maternal capabilities. In certain cases of radicalization in Afghanistan, it is conceivable that the recruitment of male relatives into terrorist groups went undetected by the wives and mothers. Empirical observations indicate that women within Pashtun tribes are predominantly restricted to household roles and possess comparatively less authority and influence in the decision-making procedures when compared to their male counterparts. Regarding this issue, it is crucial to emphasize that academic inquiries and research have proven that the idea of an inseparable link between female terrorists and their reproductive status is baseless. Women have shown the ability to engage in violent extremism autonomously. A study was done to analyze the gender dynamics of terrorist organizations, specifically focusing on women, to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

However, the current collection of literature does not provide a thorough analysis or clarification of the relationship between battle, violence, and masculinity in the context of terrorist organizations. The concept of "men-streaming," proposed by several scholars, involves recognizing men as gendered individuals involved in the process of radicalization and understanding the importance of hegemonic masculinity norms as 18 key factors. To establish more effective strategies to address the causes and prevention of malevolence, it is crucial to thoroughly assess the roles of men who are simply focused on violence. Ultimately, the recruitment tactics, approaches, and intended recipients of terrorist groups have transformed. Terrorist organizations in Pakistan often recruit girls for various assignments. In other words, the understanding of jihad has transformed from being restricted, unchanging, and peaceful to becoming broader, flexible, and

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aggressive specifically towards women. Legislators and states must adjust to this by taking into account the unique yet important positions that women have within these organizations²². The effectiveness of policy measures aimed at identifying and mitigating the risk presented by female terrorists has been hindered by the prevailing belief that women are inherently non-violent or peacekeepers and that their male counterparts coerce them into becoming violent. Therefore, it is necessary to include extra protections that are gender-neutral in comprehensive state-managed programs for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

In February and March 2022, NACTA and UN Women joined forces to launch the national media campaign "Dil Walon ka Des" (The Nation of Big-hearted People) to highlight women's contributions to peace promotion and the importance of female role models. Given the prevailing circumstances in Pakistan, characterized by the marginalization of girls and women and their limited ability to fully engage in public and political spheres, this was of utmost importance.²³

UN Women Pakistan and the National Counter Terrorism Authority Pakistan (NACTA) have collaborated to educate government officials about the role of women in either promoting or opposing extremism, to promote peace and tolerance among the youth and female population. The Pakistani government largely backs NACTA in its endeavors to counter the surge of extremism by enacting laws and involving the youth, with a specific focus on women. The architects of the National Internal Security Policy (NISP) were successful in rectifying the shortcomings of previous internal security policies. In addition, they have broadened the range of topics covered by the policy framework. The challenge has revealed the need to integrate a gender-sensitive approach into the entire security architecture. However, additional inquiry is necessary, particularly regarding the gendered elements of Player versus Environment (PVE) behaviors. Gender is regarded as one of the socioeconomic elements that are both influenced by and vulnerable to the problem of violent extremism.²⁴ Nevertheless, the authors neglect to explicitly indicate the comparative importance of gender in comparison to other variables. Gender exerts a significant influence on the distribution of economic resources and social benefits in Pakistan, a culture characterized by patriarchal norms. Hence, it is crucial to undertake a thorough and precise examination of the gender dynamics of violent extremism in Pakistan. In addition, the National Institute for Strategic Prevention (NISP) refutes the idea that women are capable of committing violent extremist crimes.

Pakistan should enhance its PVE policy by utilizing current scholarly research and integrating knowledge acquired from other countries' experiences. Research

findings suggest that women play a crucial and positive role in their communities by effectively obstructing the recruitment efforts of criminal groups like gangs. To summarize, it is not only morally permissible to include an analysis that takes into account gender differences, but it is also the most effective method of preventing and fighting violent extremism.²⁵ When designing upcoming policies, officials in Pakistan must prioritize gender issues. Given the country's past of religious and sectarian intolerance, choosing to do nothing is not a viable option. To address contemporary terrorism and extremism effectively, it is necessary to identify the main catalysts and apply suitable countermeasures, without underestimating their significance.

Addressing Women's Involvement in Peacebuilding and Combating Violent Extremism in the Light of Hadith and Quranic Verses

To effectively address women's involvement in peacebuilding and combating violent extremism, it is essential to draw upon the principles of justice, compassion, and equality as outlined in the Quran and Hadith. These Islamic teachings can serve as a moral and ethical framework for developing policies and programs that empower women and ensure their active participation in peacebuilding efforts. The following suggestions are made in light of relevant Quranic verses and Hadith:

Promote Justice and Fairness in Compensation and Support Systems

The Quran emphasizes the importance of justice, even against oneself or close relatives:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ بِالْقِسْطِ شُهَدَاءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ الْوَالِدِينَ
وَالْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَاللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىٰ أَن تَعْدِلُوا وَإِن تَلَوُوا
أَوْ تُعْرَضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا.²⁶

“O you who believe, be custodians of justice (and) witnesses for God, even though against yourselves or your parents or your relatives. Whether a man is rich or poor, God is his greater well-wisher than you. So follow not the behests of lust lest you swerve from justice; and if you prevaricate or avoid (giving evidence), God is cognizant of all that you do.”

To align with this principle, it is crucial to implement transparent and fair compensation laws across all provinces to ensure that women, particularly those who have lost male breadwinners to terrorism, can access financial support without bureaucratic obstacles. Streamlining processes and enhancing

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transparency can prevent widows from becoming entangled in legal conflicts and ensure timely assistance.

Encourage Women's Participation in Peacebuilding and Decision-Making

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the virtue of supporting widows and the poor, likening such actions to fighting for Allah's cause:

حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي مَالِكٌ، عَنْ صَفْوَانَ بْنِ سُلَيْمٍ، يَرْفَعُهُ إِلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " السَّاعِي عَلَى الْأَرْمَلَةِ وَالْمُسْكِينِ كَالْمُجَاهِدِ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، أَوْ كَالَّذِي يَصُومُ النَّهَارَ وَيَقُومُ اللَّيْلَ ". حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي مَالِكٌ، عَنْ ثَوْرِ بْنِ زَيْدِ الدَّبَلِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي الْغَيْثِ، مَوْلَى ابْنِ مُطِيعٍ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مِثْلَهُ.²⁷

Narrated Safwan bin Salim: The Prophet (ﷺ) said "The one who looks after and works for a widow and a poor person, is like a warrior fighting for Allah's Cause or like a person who fasts during the day and prays all the night." Narrated Abu Huraira that the Prophet (ﷺ) said as above.

Following this teaching, it is important to actively involve women in peacebuilding initiatives and decision-making processes. Governments and organizations should create platforms and opportunities for women to contribute to community rehabilitation and conflict resolution, recognizing their unique perspectives and contributions to social cohesion.

Implement Educational and Economic Empowerment Programs

Extremist narratives often oppose women's education and empowerment. To counteract this, it is vital to implement programs that enhance educational and economic opportunities for women. By doing so, we align with the Quranic principle of seeking knowledge and self-improvement:

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ، خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ، اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ، الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ، عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ.²⁸

"Read in the name of your Lord who created, Created man from a clinging substance. Read, and your Lord is the most Generous— Who taught by the pen— Taught man that which he knew not."

Educational initiatives should focus on providing women with skills and knowledge that enable them to participate fully in society and the economy, thus reducing their vulnerability to extremist recruitment.

Foster Community Awareness and Support for Women's Roles

Community support is crucial for the successful integration of women in peacebuilding roles. The Quran advocates for mutual support and compassion within communities:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ²⁹

"And cooperate in righteousness and piety, but do not cooperate in sin and aggression. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is severe in penalty."

Community awareness programs should be designed to highlight the importance of women's contributions to peace and security. Engaging religious and community leaders to advocate for women's roles in these areas can help shift cultural perceptions and reduce resistance to women's participation.

Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Gender Inclusion

The integrity of the legal system is essential for ensuring justice and equity. Laws must be implemented and enforced effectively to support women's rights and participation in security and peacebuilding efforts. The Quranic principle of standing firm in justice should guide the development and enforcement of these laws:

فَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْهَوَىَٰ أَنْ تَعْدِلُوا وَإِنْ تَلُوتُوا أَوْ تَعْرِضُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا³⁰

"So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed Allah is ever, with what you do, Acquainted."

Governments should review and amend existing legal frameworks to explicitly include provisions for women's participation in conflict resolution panels and public consultative bodies. Adequate resources must be allocated to ensure the effective implementation of these laws.

Promote Gender-Sensitive Security Policies

To address the unique security challenges faced by women, it is essential to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches into national security policies. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the importance of caring for the vulnerable, including women and children:

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو كُرَيْبٍ، مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْعَلَاءِ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدَةُ بْنُ سُلَيْمَانَ، عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو، حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو سَلَمَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " أَكْمَلُ

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المؤمنين إيمانًا أحسنهم خلقًا وخياركم خياركم لنسائهم خلقًا . قَالَ وَفِي الْبَابِ عَنْ عَائِشَةَ وَابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ . قَالَ أَبُو عَيْسَى حَدِيثُ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ صَحِيحٌ.³¹

Abu Hurairah narrated that The Messenger of Allah said: "The most complete of the believers in faith, is the one with the best character among them. And the best of you are those who are best to your women."

Security strategies should include specific measures to protect women from violence and radicalization, while also empowering them to play active roles in preventing and countering violent extremism. This includes training security personnel on gender-sensitive practices and ensuring women's representation in security agencies.

Emphasize the Role of Women in Promoting Peace and Social Cohesion

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) highlighted the importance of kindness and excellence in character, which are essential for promoting peace and social cohesion:

"لَنْ يُفْلِحَ قَوْمٌ وَلَوْ أَمَرَهُمْ امْرَأَةٌ"³²

"Never will succeed such a nation as lets their affairs be carried out by a woman."

Women, as nurturers and educators, play a critical role in fostering values of peace and understanding within families and communities. Programs should be developed to support and enhance women's roles in peace education and community leadership.

Address the Root Causes of Women's Involvement in Violent Extremism

To effectively combat violent extremism, it is important to address the underlying factors that contribute to women's involvement. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stressed the importance of addressing the needs and rights of individuals to prevent harm:

حَدَّثَنَا مُسَدَّدٌ، حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى، عَنْ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي نَافِعٌ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ " كُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ فَمَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ، فَالْأَمِيرُ الَّذِي عَلَى النَّاسِ رَاعٍ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُمْ، وَالرَّجُلُ رَاعٍ عَلَى أَهْلِ بَيْتِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُمْ، وَالْمَرْأَةُ رَاعِيَةٌ عَلَى بَيْتِ بَعْلِهَا وَوَلَدِهِ وَهِيَ مَسْئُولَةٌ عَنْهُمْ، وَالْعَبْدُ رَاعٍ عَلَى مَالِ سَيِّدِهِ وَهُوَ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْهُ، أَلَا فَكُلُّكُمْ رَاعٍ وَكُلُّكُمْ مَسْئُولٌ عَنْ رَعِيَّتِهِ -³³

Narrated `Abdullah: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Every one of you is a guardian and is responsible for his charges. The ruler who has authority over people is a guardian and is responsible for them, a man is a guardian of his family and is responsible for them; a

woman is a guardian of her husband's house and children and is responsible for them; a slave ('Abu) is a guardian of his master's property and is responsible for it; so all of you are guardians and are responsible for your charges."

Governments and organizations should work to eliminate poverty, provide mental health support, and create economic opportunities for women. By addressing these root causes, we can reduce the appeal of extremist groups that exploit women's vulnerabilities. By integrating these suggestions, guided by the teachings of the Quran and Hadith, we can create a more inclusive and effective approach to combating violent extremism and fostering peace. These measures not only protect and empower women but also contribute to the overall stability and cohesion of society.

Conclusion

The growing radicalization issue in Islamabad is a matter of great worry for individuals of both genders. Preventing female radicalization should be prioritized, as its long-lasting impacts can last for decades and are more challenging to stop. Madrasas are now required to undergo a true reformation as mandated by the National Action Plan (NAP). Furthermore, provincial governments must implement the measures recommended in the National Counter Extremism Policy Guidelines (NCEPG) set forth by NACTA. The policies can be implemented utilizing the technique described in the text. Furthermore, legislators must implement measures to address the widespread problem of female radicalization in society.

Although there have been significant improvements in the political participation, rights, and safety of women, those living in the northwest tribal zone of Pakistan still face significant challenges in terms of security and economic opportunities. The province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was established by merging the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) following the approval of Pakistan's 25th constitutional amendment in 2018. The amendment, in conjunction with supplementary changes, has the potential to significantly enhance the empowerment of women, particularly those who have worked for peace in regions severely affected by violence. These improvements can offer these activists and advocates a higher probability to participate in the peacebuilding endeavors in their conflict-affected regions. The lack of effective execution of reforms and an unpredictable security situation may hinder women in the NMDs from taking advantage of this substantial opportunity. To effectively address violent extremism (PVE), governments must recognize and support the diverse and influential role of women. This illustrates the need for

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laws and regulations that not only protect women from violent extremism but also provide them the ability and motivation to actively fight against it. The incorporation of policies and activities that especially focus on women into Pakistan's current security systems has achieved relatively limited success. Nevertheless, there is still considerable work to be done in integrating gender issues into the wider security decision-making process. To summarize, it is accurate to argue that gender mainstreaming is a significant inadequacy in Pakistan's security strategy. Gender mainstreaming requires ensuring fair and equal representation, influence, and resources for women and gender minorities in all four areas of PVE (prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery), despite the attempts made by Pakistani officials to encourage gender inclusion.

The involvement of women in peacebuilding and combating violent extremism is a multifaceted issue that necessitates a holistic approach rooted in justice, compassion, and equality. Drawing upon Islamic principles from the Quran and Hadith, this paper offers a series of recommendations designed to empower women, ensure their active participation in peace efforts, and protect them from radicalization. By promoting fair compensation systems, encouraging educational and economic empowerment, fostering community support, and implementing gender-sensitive security policies, we can address the unique challenges faced by women in conflict-affected regions. These suggestions aim to integrate women into the broader security framework, leveraging their vital contributions to achieve sustainable peace and social cohesion.

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²⁸Quran 96:1-5

²⁹Quran 5:2

³⁰Quran 4:135

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³²Sahih al-Bukhari :4425; Sunan an-Nasa'i :5388

³³Sahih al-Bukhari :2554